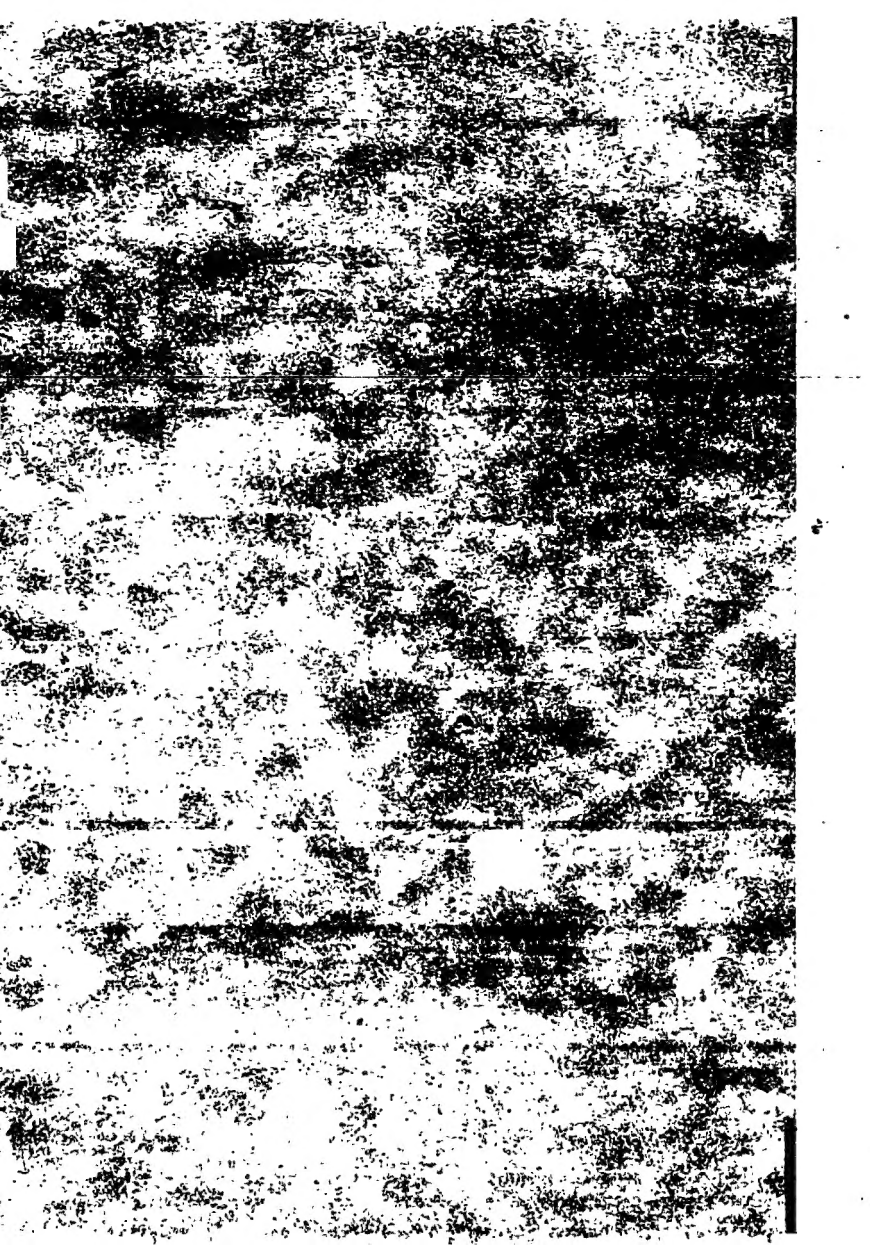


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Gardiner Presbyterian Church

Rathford Park

A Short Sketch of its History

1878 - 1907



A Paper read by
MRS EFFIE LAURIE STORER

at the Church on February 14, 1907

GARDINER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
BATTLEFORD.

Sketch of its History,
1878-1907.

A paper read by Mrs. Effie Laurie
on February 14th, 1907.

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Gardiner Presbyterian Church,

1878-1907.

The first Presbyterian service in Battleford was held by the Rev. Peter Straith in 1878 in the old log building, now tumbling down, which stands immediately east of the residence of the late P. G. Laurie, on the brow of the hill everlooking the Battle River flat. At that time the main portion of the town was on the south side of the Battle River. What is now considered to be the town was only formed in the early eighties. In the absence of a bell a flag was hoisted one half hour before service until 1880 when the bell which is now on the Protestant public school was sent out by the Church Missionary Society. After some time the place of meeting was changed to the house of Mr. Bastien, who was in charge of the Hudson's Bay Company's post, until a building was erected, by public subscription, for use as a church and school and for public meetings. An organ was purchased and placed in the building for the use of both denominations. Mr. Straith and the Ven. Archdeacon McKay, who is still

well-known here, held alternate services, and it is worthy of note that the same choir provided music for both denominations. After Mr. Straith's return to Ontario in 1880 Presbyterian services were discontinued until the arrival of Rev. Dr. Robertson in 1883. As Superintendent of Presbyterian Missions he made a tour of the West and expressed both surprise and pleasure at the class of people he found in the "Great Lone Land." He held services twice on Sabbath in the Council Chamber of Government House. In addressing the congregation he said, by way of apology for neglecting this field so long, "that representations had been made continually and, while not doubting the truthfulness of those who urged the matter, it was thought that perhaps that they were too sanguine and, on this account, the Church had been slow to take action. However, he saw he was mistaken and assured the people that a part of the cost of a building would now be lent to them, in such proportion and on such terms as to interest and re-payment as the congregation might require." He also explained that all would be expected to contribute, according to their means, towards the support of their minister. After the service a committee was

formed to present the wishes of the people and thus was laid the foundation of a permanent service. The ladies assisted with concerts and socials in raising the necessary funds for the erection of a temporary church. Several months elapsed between the time of Dr. Robertson's visit and the arrival of Rev. Mr. Cameron. This was due to the fact of a call having been extended to Rev. Mr. Tibb, of Rapid City, which he was unable to accept, and, owing to the difficulties of the mail service, communication with the outer world was slow. Swift Current, the nearest railway station, lay 200 miles to the south and a fortnightly mail was considered a luxury.

Mr. Cameron arrived in July, 1884. For a time services were held in a house, owned by P. G. Laurie, on the flat south of the Battle River. The congregation, when all present, numbered about twenty and on a fine Sabbath some of the members would arrive in a light wagon with a small organ—and then the music was good. Other times the tune of Gainsborough was made to do service for a psalm and the hymns. More than one Old-Timer can still hear the ring of "I to the hills will lift mine eyes" to that good old wavering tune led by Mr. Cameron.

The temporary church was erected that fall and was afterwards sold and the proceeds given towards the building fund of the new church. It stood on the brow of the hill midway between the two towns and convenient to the barracks. A large number of police were stationed here then and the "Boys in Red" often formed the largest part of the congregation. Eventually the church was moved up town to the site now occupied by the bakery, a part of which is the original church. In 1885 the churches united in observing the week of prayer for the first time. The meetings were well attended and much enjoyed. A Blue Ribbon Society was formed with most gratifying results but was interrupted by the Rebellion.

During the seige services were held in a marquee in the barrack square every Sabbath, all the missionaries officiating.

Mr. Rowand succeeded Mr. Cameron, who resigned on account of poor health, in the fall of 1885. Socials were given that winter to increase the building fund. On one occasion the sum of \$250 was realized. The police band always furnished the music voluntary for these entertainments and they usually ended in a dance.

Mr. Gardiner arrived in June, 1886, and the contract for this brick church was let in July. A bottle is deposited in the brickwork which contains a short history of the church, the minister's name, the communion roll, the names of the managing committee, the choir, the building committee, the contractor and the officers of the N. W. M. P. of this post and a copy of the Saskatchewan Herald. A vote was taken as to the name of the church and Gardiner was the almost unanimous choice. Mr. Gardiner had the board with the hours of service supplied at his own expense. The building cost \$2375, of which all but \$800 was paid. The church was opened on Nov. 7th, 1886, with a communion roll of 35. Mr. Gardiner took as his text "How much owest thou unto my Lord?" and divided the subject into three bills:—1st, rent; 2nd, board: and 3rd, the blessed enjoyment of the Bible. He pointed out the priceless privileges we enjoy while other nations grope vainly for the light. The sermon was most impressive and left each hearer to answer "How much owest thou?" The anthem "How Beautiful upon the Mountain" was rendered by the choir and the congregational singing of the hymns was most hearty. The collections for

the day amounted to \$125. Mr. Gardiner possessed that peculiar magnetism which attracted people to him and in this way was the means of great good. During the fever epidemic he was most untiring in his efforts, especially among the police boys. Thirty-one persons joined the church during his ministry of less than a year.

Shortly after moving into the church the organ was found to be too small. So it was sold and the one still in use was purchased, the difference in the cost being collected by Mrs. Skelton and Mrs. Oliver.

Mr. John Hogg, of Winnipeg, was in charge from 1887 to 1889 and often the church was filled by people of all denominations until it lacked even standing room.

It fell to the lot of Mr. Brydon to endure the dark days of the church. Crops had failed during the dry years and money was scarce while the price of provisions was high. Often it was impossible to keep his salary paid up to date. But he and his wife, by their cheerfulness and bravery, endeared themselves to many who still cherish the memory of their ministry here. After a term of seven years

Mr. Brydon removed to Willoughby. He is now in the Shell River district and still takes the kindest interest in his old charge.

Mr. Brydon left in 1895, and following him came Mr. Irwin for a few months and then Mr. Laing for two years. It was during the pastorate of the latter that the Christian Endeavour Society flourished. Mr. Laing was a most energetic leader and, assisted by his wife, succeeded in arousing the enthusiasm of the young people. The weekly meetings were well attended and the monthly meeting took either the form of a concert, at which a first-class programme was given, or a social, sometimes given in the church but more often at the home of one of the members. In contrasting the Endeavour work of to-day it is only just to the young people of 1895-96 to say that they had a good skating rink and a quadrille club which they still had time to enjoy to the utmost without interfering with their church work. Rev. Father Lacombe, who has labored for 55 years in the West, in speaking of the progress of civilization said "that while he was proud of it, he did not consider it an unmixed good. He did not believe that people were happier or much

better than in the primitive days, when strong in faith, they lived their simple lives."

Mr. Laing was transferred to Whitewood and was succeeded by Mr. Sutherland. On more than one occasion during his term of five years he thanked the choir for their support and strove to impress the fact that they sang as surely for the glory of God as did ever minister preach. He believed that many a heart had been touched by music that a text had failed to impress. Therefore it was of the greatest importance that they should always "do their best." It was during his stay that the tide of immigration turned this way and the Barr Colony arrived.

Mr. Fisher and Mr. Cameron followed, after them Mr. Weir and Mr. Little, whose work you are all familiar with.

The Gardiner congregation has always been to a certain extent a floating one. People came and went just as fortune or business dictated. But the members have always had pleasant memories to carry with them.

The impression that we are just coming into the ways of civilization is quite erroneous

because we have always been up-to-date. In other days the services were advertised and the subject of the sermons, also the name of the anthems to be sung, were known a week ahead. Frequently a service, more particularly for the young, was announced, or a service of song. And the greatest interest was taken in every form of church work.

In 1903 the roll numbered 55, but when East and West Eagle Hills and other portions of the district received a Missionary a number transferred their names to their own locality. Thus the roll only numbered 29 when Mr. Little came. Now it contains 63 names.

Gardiner Church has always been noted for its liberality to the schemes of the church and to foreign missions. More than once it has stood next to Regina and has never been far down on the list.

Although the choir takes such an important part in the service the work is not all pleasure—there are the dark days—and wet Sundays. Often it would be impossible to “trudge bravely on,” were it not for the encouragement received from pulpit and pew.

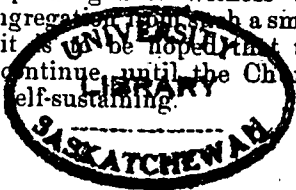
Many who now sit in the congregation sang in the choir in earlier days so can understand the difficulties to be met.

The organ has been presided at various times during these years by Mrs. A. B. McKay, Miss Effie Laurie, Mrs. D. L. Clink, Mrs. Skelton, Miss Kettle, Miss Florence Skelton, the Misses Oliver and Miss Clouston.

Death has entered the ranks of the choir three times but, with the exception of possibly Mr. Straith, never our pulpit. Mr. Hogg is on the superannuation list but all the other ministers have charges.

I might say that since 1884 there has always been a Sunday School and, with few exceptions, the Christmas entertainment and the summer picnic have been annual affairs.

As you are aware the Manse has recently been erected and the Church placed on the Augmentation List and enabled to call Mr. Little. It is indeed gratifying to the few who have been privileged to witness the growth of the congregation from such a small beginning, and it is to be hoped that the prosperity may continue until the Church becomes entirely self-sustaining.



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